DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 402 645 EA 028 077

AUTHOR Knox, Rodney F.
TITLE Changing the Schools' Climate To Reduce Student Violence.
PUB DATE 12 Aug 96
NOTE 13p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Discipline Policy; *Educational Environment; Elementary Secondary Education; Organizational Climate; *School Safety; *School Security; Student Behavior; *Violence

ABSTRACT

Learning cannot take place in an atmosphere of fear or intimidation. The goal of today's schools must be to develop strategies and provide resources that will reduce acts of student violence in both number and intensity. This paper identifies the characteristics of well-disciplined schools: clearly identified relevant curriculum goals, an emphasis on positive behavior, cooperation with all members of the school community to find solutions, staff involvement, sensitivity to issues of race and socioeconomic factors, and central-office support of intervention programs. Well-disciplined schools also develop partnerships, conduct needs assessments, prevent unwarranted access to school property, and develop norms that value student responsibility and citizenship. The paper also offers brief examples of intervention strategies used at a middle school. (Contains seven references.) (LMI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

E

ED 402 645

Changing The Schools' Climate to Reduce Student Violence

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

R. Knox

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC).

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

EA028077

EA

Changing The Schools' Climate to Reduce Student Violence

The ideas, hopes, aspirations, creativity, and cultures of the people who make up our great society are expected to meet and successfully function within our public schools. Within these same walls however, are individuals who may make socially inappropriate and unacceptable decisions regarding the resolution of their personal conflicts. These decisions sometimes manifest themselves in acts of verbal or physical violence that are directed at other individuals or even at the building representing the system whose rules and regulations they find confinding and unreasonable (Blanton, 1994).

Most students come to school each day to be successfully engaged in the excellent instructional programs and services that are available to them. Yet, the inappropriate actions of a few individuals cast aspersions on the same successful programs and services. One need only read the daily newspaper or tune into the evening news broadcast to be informed of acts of violence in our schools. Learning cannot take place in an atmosphere of fear or intimidation, be it real or imaginary. The misdeeds of one can hamper the learning of many.

There are generally two types of schools: those that have had a significant incident and those that will. Perfect schools do not exist in today's society but our communities expect and demand that school administrators provide a safe secure environment for their children.

EA028077

Before school administrators can address the issues of school violence, they must realize that in some cases they will be dealing with student and family problems that are beyond their ability to control or manage. Schools will never be able to totally eliminate all acts of students violence; any other belief is unrealistic. The goal of today's schools must be to develop strategies and provide resources that will reduce acts of student violence in both number and intensity.

Well-disciplined schools do not happen by accident. These schools value and use successful practices used in other schools and proven in research. They realize that appropriate school discipline must be a part of every program, curriculum, and practice. The entire school organization must be designed to support and encourage student responsibility. Also, to address those issues and behaviors that are not conducive to instructional and academic success (Hartwig, 1994).

Well-disciplined schools identify clear, concise, and relevant curriculum goals. Curriculum is viewed as a "living document" that require periodic and timely evaluation and modifications. Through both instructional and non-instructional programs, the school's focus is totally student oriented. Programs are instituted for the benefit of the students. Staff members appreciate and understand their role as student advocates.

Whenever student misbehaviors occur, the symptoms as well as causes are reviewed and addressed if possible. All student management programs emphasize positive student behaviors, student responsibility and preventive measures, rather than punitive actions, to address student misbehaviors. Well-disciplined schools would rather "catch students doing something right" than catch them doing something wrong.

According to Glasser (1990), these schools also realize that time is an enemy of everything they do and appreciate the opportunity to customize successful practices borrowed from neighboring schools.

The principals of these schools value staff, student, and community partnerships and provide them with opportunities to help fashion solutions to various school problems. This cooperative environment is readily discernible in the unusual amounts of time and energy that staff and community members expend in demonstrating their belief in what students can accomplish. No one person can make a successful school.

Just as all school programs and activities affect the climate of a school, there are also common organizational variables in schools that should be addressed when developing appropriate student management philosophies and practices. (Hill, 1994).

The most prominent variable in any school orgranizational structure is the school's staff. The attitudes, interest, and commitment of the staff members are evident through their rules and expectations, visibility, and willingness to participate in committees to address the needs of the school and community.

School management issues show a clear movement from the traditional practices of the "Stern, fierce school marm" (Blanton et al., 1994), to the transitional practices of administrative intervention with rules enforcement, to the transformational practice or full staff involvement. The principal is valued as a facilator of teacher-initiated discipline and he or she uses a repertoire of intervention strategies (Smith, 1990).

Well-disciplined schools are sensitive to their students' racial and socioeconomic concerns and how these are manifested in the instructional program. Most students are informed and aware of their rights and responsibilities as citizens in a democratic society. A wide range of intervention strategies (teacher discussion, informal or formal counseling, parent contact and conferences, detentions and suspensions) are available and used when necessary. Staff members are skilled in identifying at risk students and have available school activities have a profound positive impact on school discipline.

Students, especially those who may be classified as at-risk, are encouraged and counseled to participate in rigorous academic classes as well as in the school's co-curricular program. Well-disciplined schools realize that just as students and their problems change periodically, so must the philosophies and strategies used to help them meet their potential. The entire school community participates in program development and refinement.

Well-disciplined schools are familiar with and use the resources of other organizations. The local police departments, court systems, child welfare organizations, and job placement agencies can also provide schools with additional intervention strategies and resources that can be bought to bear on the needs of students and their families.

Schools are made up of students, staff members, and the community members that support them. All of these people should be assessed on how they perceive the safety and security of the school (Wayson, 1982).

Assessments may be done formally through questionnaires or informally through discussions with representative constituent groups. The assessment can provide insight into the perceived or actual needs of the school or district. Administrators should not be wary of assessments, even though they may be told things they do not wish to hear (p. 19).

School buildings and campus should be assessed as the first step in creating a safe and secure environment. Local police and fire departments will readily assist schools to perform a security review of the school plant. This may involve a review of the school's lighting, parking, security staff and procedures, alarm systems, and general procedures related to open and ongoing communications with the local authorities.

Schools are not immune to fires, earthquakes, chemical spills, bombs and icendiary devices, medical emergencies, trespassers, nuclear events from nearby power plants and other natural or man made-disasters. A prudent administrator plans for the possibility of these events. A good administrator must be part optimist and part pessimist: an optimist in planning successful activities and programs, a pessimist in developing plans to address a multitude of potential disasters and dangers and dangerous situations (Johnson, 1995).

Orderly and courteous students are essential to maintaining safe schools. Although most schools are blessed with a large population of these students, schools also have students whose social skills are still developing and require appropriate and timely adult intervention. Objective data on student management issues, formulated over an extended period of time, are key to determining where additional resources or review must address any inequities in the system.

Incident reports covering a broad range of topics (class cutting, truancy, fighting, weapons in schools, drug and alcohol involvement, and vandalism) need to be created and institutionalized. School personnel should not fear the results of these surveys. They are the key to addressing the needs of the school and should be shared with constituent groups that posses the power to provide needed resources.

In most communities, the schools are the largest and most focal of all institutions, both private and public. Access to all should be encouraged. Barriers to the handicapped should be eliminated and the community should be encourage to use the school for community events. But schools must also prevent unwarranted access by individuals whose interests are not conducive to the educational process. Outside doors should be locked and secured with one or two entry points for visitors to use. All staff members should be comfortable in approaching visitors in the schools to assist them in their needs or to guide them to the proper area. All doors should be clearly labeled to direct visitors to the limited entry points. The district's policy and local laws concerning trespassing on school property should be made clear to all (Blanton, 1994).

Students should be rewarded for positive behavior. They also need to be informed of their rights, responsibilities, and obligations as productive citizens in a democratic society.

With these rights and responsibilities come explicit consequences for students who choose not to be productive and contributing members of the school. All students need to be reminded of the school's rules and regulations and associated behavioral consequences, both at the start of and throughout the school year.

In today's large and complex schools, more than one individual is usually involved with student management. Be it the teacher, the dean, the assistant principal, the guidance counselor, or the principal, consistency within the team of people responsible for the task, is always an issue open to discussion and criticism. School leaders will often find themselves torn between the philosophy of the student as a person and the fact that in the minds of students, staff, parents and all students should be treated exactly the same regardless of the circumstances involved (Johnson, 1995).

Certainly, for the most part, consistency must rule. But sometimes, the key to a successful intervention with a particular student is his or her understanding and realization that someone, finally, really listened and took his or her concerns and problems into consideration. Student management is a tightrope that an administrator walks, without the comfort of a safety net.

Schools with good discipline have programs, strategies, and philosophies that support and value student responsibility and proper citizenship as fundamental components of good discipline. Everything a school does, from curriculum to co-curricular activities to staff hiring practices, must be taken into consideration that instruction cannot occur without good discipline (Hill, 199).

The following are some of the intervention strategies that have been successfully initiated at Apollo Middle School:

Teenage Awareness Group Seminar- This seminar teaches socially appropriate skills to help students deal with anger in a positive, constructive manner. The curriculum recognizes that violent behavior is due to a loss of control and it is this problem that the seminar addresses. Trained student and faculty facilitators guide participants through the anger management curriculum which offers students a wide variety of alternative options to express and deal with anger. Students who have been involved in a fight or a serious verbal altercation must attend this program. Other students may attend the seminar. A separate seminar is available in the evening for parents of assigned students as well as other parties.

Teen Outreach- Our Human Understanding and Growth Program provides weekly workshops with small group of students, who may also meet with the facilitator on an as needed basis. The curriculum covers adolescent development (human sexuality, drug use/abuse, an peer pressure) with an emphasis on decision making skills, proving nominated and voluntary students a chance to discuss sensitive issues with their peers during a twenty-week program.

P.A.I.R. Program- The partners acting as Instructional Resources program teams volunteer faculty members (instructional and noninstructional) with selected students who have exhibited some characteristic (attendance, behavior, academics, and attitude) that which may hinder them from reaching their full potential.

Contact between the pairs is determined by the adult and the student. This big brother/big sister format gives students an adult advocate to speak with and offer advise and guidance.

There are many other successful intervention programs such as Peer Mediation, Pupil Personnel Services, and Student Awareness Sessions. Not all students will find success in a traditional four-year high school. This is not intended to be a negative statement; everyone has different rates of success and learning curves. For students who require alternative education settings, including the two through five percent of chronic offenders whose behavior can interfere with the education of others. Schools need to develop programs that will provide a full range of educational, counseling, and career educational opportunities. Whether it is on-site, as is our individual placement class, or a program that uses the school building after regular school day. Opportunities should be available so all students can acquire the skills they will need.

The central office plays a key role in this process. They must support the programs and practices of the school. This may be done through their support of site-based management, having the confidence and determination to work with recidivist students and their parents, or providing the needed financial resources for alternative programs, staff development, security staff, permanent substitute teachers, and co-curricular programs. The new adage of "top-down support of bottom-up reform" must be shown in action, not in words.

References

Blanton, Charlie, et al. (1994). Rethinking student discipline. Thousand Oaks, California.: Corwin Press.

Glasser, William. (1990). The quality school. NASSP Bulletin, 80, 19-21.

Hartwig, Eric, P., and Ruesch, Gary, M. (1994). Discipline in the school. Horsham, PA.: LRP Publications.

Hill, Frank, W., and Hill, Marie Somers. (1994). Creating safe schools. Thousand Oaks, California.: Corwin Press.

Johnson, David, W., and Johnson, Roger, T. (1996). Integrate violence prevention into schools. Education Digest, 61. 8-13.

Smith, Stuart, C., and Scott, James J. (1990). The collaborative school. Eugene, Oregon.: University of Oregon.

Wayson, William, et al. (1982). Handbook for developing schools with good discipline. Phil Delta Kappa, 39. 34-46.